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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses a qualitative case study that examined faculty attempts to establish and maintain a faculty council as a means of furthering shared governance between administrators and education faculty at a college of education over a 4-year period (1996-2000). Initial experience in shared governance--faculty members participating in problem solving, decision making, and policy development--was first presented at the 1997 annual meeting of the Mid-South Educational Research Association. Putting shared governance into action in the College of Education at Mississippi State University has been an up and down process, resulting in fluctuations in enthusiasm, progress, and delays. This paper reports that in the 2000-2001 academic year, the Faculty Council met infrequently, that maintaining shared governance has not been easy, and that the future looks bleak. However, a valuable lesson has been learned: unless administrators sincerely embrace the concept and support ways for putting shared governance into practice, the concept will not be realized. (DFR)

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FACULTY PARTICIPATION IN GOVERNANCE:

A FOUR-YEAR LONGITUDINAL STUDY

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Abstract: This qualitative case study reports our experiences in shared governance over a four-year period (1996-2000) at a college of education. Our initial experience in shared governance was first presented at the 1997 annual meeting of the Mid-South Educational Research Association (MSERA). Putting shared governance into action in the College of Education at Mississippi State University has not been considered an easy task.

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This qualitative case study traces events during the fourth academic year (1999-2000) of a four-year effort, beginning in the fall of 1996, to establish and maintain a faculty council for the College of Education at Mississippi State University as the means for furthering shared governance between administrators and faculty. For the purpose of this paper, the term "shared governance" is defined as faculty members participating in problem solving, decision making, and policy development.

The issue of shared governance has concerned academics on university campuses for many years owing to the belief that academic institutions are best governed through active, informed participation by its faculty members. Advocates of shared governance contend that traditional (top down) higher education governance structures and practices are ill-equipped to accommodate the need for flexibility and rapid responses to changing conditions in the social, technological, economic, and political environments (Lee, 1979; Ramo 1997; Schuster 1991; Wolvin 1991).

Deans and their administrative staffs cannot unilaterally resolve the complex and interrelated issues confronting colleges of education. If such organizations are to function effectively and efficiently, multifaceted collaborative efforts involving faculty in policy development and decision making need to be launched (Blendinger, Cornelious & McGrath, 1997).

Faculty councils (or senates) for colleges (or schools) of education provide a mechanism for putting shared governance into practice. Making faculty councils work, however, is not an easy matter. Faculty councils function best when their members are mission-driven, make sincere commitments to the tasks confronting them, and demand on-going discourse about issues and matters facing the college (Cornelious, McGrath, & Blendinger 1998).

Research Design

This study traces an attempt by faculty to establish and maintain shared governance in a college of education from within the movement for a four-year period. As researchers, we are "complete participants" in the process because our ongoing study involves a setting in which we are members. For four years, we have personally witnessed events as they happened. Although we are no longer members of the council charged with the responsibility of putting shared governance into practice due to term limits and other factors, we have, nevertheless, closely followed events.

Data for this paper were collected through direct observation and the analysis of primary source documents such as written guidelines, agenda for meetings, minutes of meetings, notes, memoranda, letters, and reports. Documents included handwritten and typed material, material prepared for the public record, and material intended only for private use.

Shared Governance: Roaring Flames

In the fall of 1995, the members of one of the college's many advisory committees, committees known for doing little and rarely meeting, became intrigued with the idea of shared governance. Fueled by the vision of what could be, committee members rolled up their sleeves, established an agenda, and worked toward making shared governance a reality. In the spring of 1996, the governance guidelines were unanimously approved by the faculty of the College of Education and put into practice for the 1996-97 academic year.

Creation of the Faculty Council was one of the major outcomes of the guidelines. The guidelines also defined the composition of the faculty of the College of Education and the faculty's role in shared governance. Specific areas addressed in the guidelines included voting eligibility, identification of officers, how meetings should be conducted, and various operational procedures.

Once established, the Faculty Council, originally comprised of 15 members representing the college's academic departments and research units, moved rapidly to become a viable mechanism for facilitating communication and cooperation between faculty and the administration. Its major purpose was to represent the faculty in advising the Dean on issues and matters directly related to fulfillment of the college's mission (Blendinger, Cornelious & McGrath, 1997).

Faculty Council accomplishments during its first year (1996-97) of operation included:

1. Working with the associate dean for instruction to develop a planning, policy and procedures manual for the college.

2. Becoming involved in revisions proposed for the college's promotion and tenure guidelines. When the dean and the promotion and tenure committee could not come to agreement concerning proposed revisions, the council intervened in the process in an attempt to provide necessary assistance.

3. Addressing the budget allocation process.

4. Surveying the faculty to determine attitudes toward changing the college's name, modifying the governance guidelines, and examining the status of department heads.

5. Scheduling a general faculty meeting, with approximately 99% of the faculty attending, to discuss (1) progress made in preparing for an upcoming NCATE accreditation visit, and (2) the dean's agenda for restructuring the college.

The Faculty Council concluded its first year of operation with members feeling good about the potential of shared governance. It should be noted that the authors of this paper were charter members of the council (Blendinger, Cornelious & McGrath, 1997).

Shared Governance: Flickering Flames

The Faculty Council established written goals to guide its work for the 1997-98 academic year. Establishing goals was an evolutionary step forward. Unfortunately, many of the senior faculty members (tenured full and associate professors) who served on the council during its initial year either retired or rotated off. They were

replaced by nontenured newcomers at the assistant professor rank. Two of the paper's authors rotated off the council.

Goal accomplishment was uneven. Goals addressing the allocation of resources (e.g., faculty travel money) and policy recommendations (e.g., proposed changes to the college's promotion and tenure guidelines) were not accomplished. Influence on administrative decision making was minimal. The council's intention to positively shape the college's organizational culture through establishing displays recognizing and celebrating faculty accomplishments was only partially realized. Responsibility for culture shaping was delegated to academic departments and results were less than hoped. On the positive side of the ledger, the council's review of the college's required undergraduate and graduate core courses of study in relation to curriculum congruence and instructional quality resulted in the elimination of one required graduate course considered unessential (Cornelious, McGrath & Blendinger, 1998).

Shared Governance: Diminishing Flames

The flames that burnt so brightly for Faculty Council during its inaugural year significantly diminished in its third year of existence. During the 1998-99 academic year, the council faced several challenging issues which included:

1. Working with the university chapter of Phi Delta Kappa to create a Herb Handley and Cindy Rose display case in the Phi Delta Kappa Reading Room of the Mitchell Memorial Library.
2. Honoring faculty (e.g., retirement, years of service, outstanding accomplishments, etc.) with an annual recognition reception.
3. Identifying objective indicators to assist in the assigning of numerical values to faculty members' annual reviews.
4. Designing an instrument to measure faculty morale.
5. Developing fair methods for determining merit.
6. Revising guidelines for the faculty annual review process.

Unfortunately, the council failed to make satisfactory progress on any of the above mentioned issues. In addition, the council's influence on administrative decision making was minimal. Interest in shared governance continued to wane and almost all the original members of the council were no longer active, having rotated off due to retiring, leaving the university for other employment, or not being elected for another term. Similar to the 1997-98 academic year, their places were mostly taken by nontenured assistant professors new to the college. On the positive side of the ledger, however, the Faculty Council:

1. Unanimously agreed to schedule a meeting with American Federation of Teachers (AFT) representatives for all interested faculty members during the 1999-00 academic year.

2. Gained approval of the faculty as a whole in revising the council's operating guidelines to make them more workable.

3. Unanimously approved a nine-step procedure for faculty members to use in submitting concerns and issues that operates as follows:

   a. Concerns and issues to be addressed by the College of Education Faculty Council must be presented to the Council Chair in writing with the proposer's name appearing thereon. Upon receipt of the written concern or issue, the Council Chair shall determine whether to first present it to the Council or to the appropriate standing committee for consideration.

   b. If the concern or issue is first presented to the Council, the question shall be to either take action or send it to the appropriate committee for further processing.

   c. After considering the concern or issue, the committee to which it has been assigned is expected to provide the Council with a report and recommendations in a timely manner.

   d. Questions of facts may be asked of the committee following its report.

   e. Following the questions of fact, debate shall take place on the question of adopting the proposed recommendation, as presented by the committee, as a recommendation of the Council. Amendments may be offered from the floor.

   f. One recommendation, or more, adequately based on such a report, may be adopted in the meeting at which the report is given only if the committee

has provided the members of the Council with a written copy of its report at least three full days before the meeting at which the report is given.

g. A proposed recommendation shall be adopted by the Council when it receives the vote of a majority of the Council's members present and voting "aye" or "nay." Each recommendation shall carry with it a notation of the number of members voting "aye," "nay", and abstaining.

h. A recommendation of no action, or the failure of a committee to make a report or recommendation, shall not preclude the right of the Council to take further action on a proposed recommendation or a variation of it.

i. External Resolutions--The proposing and adopting of resolutions pertaining to persons or matters outside the Council shall follow the procedure of proposed recommendation, for adoption, except that if such a proposed resolution shall have been presented to the Council Chair so as to have been included by him/her in the notification of the agenda to the Council members at least three full days in advance of a meeting, it can be moved for adoption at that meeting.

4. Established three standing committees charged with addressing concerns and issues:

a. Faculty Affairs Committee--addresses concerns and issues pertaining to members of the General Faculty, such as equity in course assignments, merit increases, annual reviews, complaints, etc.

b. Student Affairs Committee--addresses concerns and issues pertaining to students, both undergraduate and graduate.

c. College Affairs Committee--addresses concerns and issues pertaining to the administration of the College of Education, such as budget allocations, resources provided, policy violations, or morale studies.

Overall, Faculty Council accomplishments during the 1998-99 academic year could be considered minimal at best. Desire to share in the governance process diminished (McGrath, Blendinger, & Cornelious, 1999).

Shared Governance: Glowing Embers

Interest in shared governance continued to diminish during the 1999-2000 academic year. Because of the faculty's preoccupation with a long overdue task force report on restructuring the college, eroding morale, and general apathy, little attention was given to the council's work. Moreover, the dean recommended replacing the

council with an information disseminating group that included administrators and clerical staff in addition to faculty. Lack of accomplishment defined the 1999-2000 Faculty Council. The following agenda items were never realized:

1. Herb Handley and Cindy Rose display cases in the Phi Delta Kappa Reading Room of the Mitchell Memorial Library.
2. Honoring faculty (e.g., retirement, years of service, outstanding accomplishments, etc.) with an annual recognition reception.
3. Objective indicators to assist in the assigning of numerical values to faculty members' annual reviews.
4. Development of an instrument to measure faculty morale.
5. Fair methods for determining merit.
6. Guidelines for the faculty annual review process.
7. Meetings scheduled with American Federation of Teachers (AFT) representatives for interested faculty members.

Ushering in the millennium was not a successful experience. None of the council's stated goals were accomplished. Enthusiasm for shared governance proved difficult to sustain.

Implications of the Study

The evolution of shared governance at MSU's College of Education has been an up and down process. The desire to share in the governance of the college that once burned brightly has dwindled to warm coals. Thus far in the 2000-01 academic year, the Faculty Council has met infrequently. None of the paper's authors are now members of the council.

Maintaining shared governance in the College of Education at Mississippi State University has not been an easy task and the future appears bleak. But after four years of involvement in the movement, a valuable lesson has been learned; unless administrators sincerely embrace the concept and support ways, such as faculty councils, for putting shared governance into practice, the concept cannot be realized.

If colleges of education are to effectively involve faculty in problem solving, decision making, or policy development, actual anecdotal cases of the life and times of faculty councils, like the one described in this paper, and longitudinal studies, such as ours, are needed to develop an authentic literature base addressing shared governance. We believe our latest study, chronicling four years of experience with shared governance, makes a meaningful contribution to the literature base.

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